



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

August 10, 2005

News Release

GUATEMALAN MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO CONSPIRING TO TRANSPORT ILLEGAL ALIENS, ILLEGALLY RE-ENTERING U.S.

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — A Guatemalan man pleaded guilty in federal court today to conspiring to transport illegal aliens within the United States and to illegally re-entering the United States, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), announced Todd P. Graves, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri.

Gelson Omar Mancilla-Santiago, 22, a citizen of Guatemala, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Nanette K. Laughrey this morning to charges contained in an Aug. 5 federal indictment.

By pleading guilty today, Mancilla-Santiago admitted that he participated in a conspiracy to operate a business of transporting illegal aliens in the United States and that he illegally re-entered the United States after having been deported.

Mancilla-Santiago, who had been deported from the United States Oct. 25, 2004, admitted to his role in the conspiracy to operate a business of transporting illegal aliens from at least as early as May 2005 to June 19, 2005, in Missouri as well as California and Virginia.

Conspirators arranged to pick up illegal aliens and transport them from one location to another within the United States, Graves said, charging the illegal aliens a fee for their transportation.

Mancilla-Santiago was contacted by a person to drive a van from Los Angeles, Calif., to New York. On June 18, the person who contacted Mancilla-Santiago provided him with a van and money, and more than 17 illegal aliens were loaded into the van.

On June 19, the van, which was carrying more than 17 illegal alien passengers, crossed the state line into Missouri and was involved in a traffic accident near Columbia, Mo., in which five persons were killed. Mancilla-Santiago admitted that he shared in the driving with another person, Graves said, but Mancilla-Santiago claimed that he was not driving the van at the time of the accident.

Graves added that the van had been previously involved in transporting another load of illegal aliens to Virginia.

Under federal statutes, Mancilla-Santiago could be subject to a sentence of up to seven years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$500,000. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the U.S. Probation Office completes the pre-sentence investigation.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Anthony P. Gonzalez is prosecuting this case. Missouri State Highway Patrol assisted ICE with the investigation.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.